

**Testimony: Jennifer Alexander, Chief Executive Officer, ConnCAN**  
*Education Committee Public Hearing*  
*Wednesday, February 25, 2015*

Good afternoon Chairman Fleischmann and Chairwoman Slossberg. My name is Jennifer Alexander and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, better known as ConnCAN. ConnCAN is a statewide education advocacy organization focused on ensuring all kids get the high-quality education they deserve, regardless of race, wealth, or zip code.

I'd like to start by thanking you and this committee for the work you've done to move education forward in Connecticut. Your efforts to date have been important steps in ensuring that every child in Connecticut has access to excellent schools. Despite your strong efforts, however, far too many students, nearly 40,000, who are disproportionately children of color and low-income students, remain in schools that are chronically and persistently low-performing. In addition, at our current rate of progress it will take between 46 years and 75 years to close Connecticut's achievement gaps.<sup>1</sup> We can and must do more. All children deserve a great education now.

Before you today are two bills that will put us one step closer to our goal of providing all children with the quality education they deserve—Senate Bills 942 and 943.

ConnCAN supports the intent of the legislation proposed in these bills put forward by Governor Malloy, and we are grateful for his past and current efforts to improve public education. However, we believe there are key policy recommendations that the Connecticut General Assembly should consider to make the proposed legislation even stronger and move our children, and the state of Connecticut, toward a brighter and more prosperous future.

In particular, ConnCAN recommends policy changes to modernize Connecticut's 20-year-old charter law and make improvements to our state's efforts to turnaround our lowest-performing schools through the Commissioner's Network.

First, we are pleased that S.B. 943, entitled *An Act Concerning Charter School Modernization and Reform*, calls for much needed improvements to Connecticut's outdated charter school law. Time and again, external reviews of our charter law show that Connecticut's system of approving, regulating and funding charter schools has fallen out of line with best practices in other states.<sup>2</sup> We must improve this law to help charter schools continue to deliver on the promise of an excellent public education for students and ensure that charter schools remain

---

<sup>1</sup>[http://webiva-downton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/05/0761/ConnCAN\\_2013\\_CMT-CAPT\\_Analysis.pdf](http://webiva-downton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/05/0761/ConnCAN_2013_CMT-CAPT_Analysis.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See e.g., National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS). "Measuring Up to the Model: A Ranking of State Charter School Laws - Connecticut." January 2015.

[http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/model\\_law\\_2015.pdf](http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/model_law_2015.pdf)

And, The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NASCA). "On The Road to Better Accountability: An Analysis of State Charter School Policies." December 2014.

[http://www.qualitycharters.org/assets/files/Documents/Policy/NACSA\\_014\\_SLR\\_FINAL\\_1-15-15.pdf](http://www.qualitycharters.org/assets/files/Documents/Policy/NACSA_014_SLR_FINAL_1-15-15.pdf)

- Set standards for performance on annual and interim achievement assessments and leading indicators of turnaround success.
- Streamline the turnaround plan development process by ensuring that: 1) the state sets clear parameters for turnaround models; 2) turnaround committee takes one consensus vote on the plan prior to submitting it to state; and 3) Commissioner retains authority to approve or deny the turnaround plan.
- Allow successful schools to have the option to stay in the Network with ongoing autonomy and accountability, and allow the state to appoint a proven turnaround leader, lead partner, or charter management organization to operate unsuccessful schools in the Network.

In this extraordinarily difficult budget environment, we must ensure that every dollar invested in public education has maximum impact for children. Sensible changes like the ones outlined above will do just that.

We've come a long way in recent years and we have the opportunity to build upon the progress that you all have championed. Our children are now depending on you to, once again, act boldly and swiftly to ensure they have access to the best schools and the education they deserve.